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## Gag oath asked on arms policy

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WASHINGTON - In a highly unusual effort to prevent news leaks, the White House has asked the small group of Cabinet officials and their closest aides who are involved in policy debates over the Administration's new arms control stance to sign a three-page nondisclosure pledge.

Sources say the signatories, to include Secretary of State George P. Shultz and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger, are forbidden to discuss the substance of preparations for Geneva talks in January with anyone who has not signed the sworn statement. Tight restrictions have also been placed on options papers.

If these senior officials desire to discuss technical or policy aspects of the issues with someone not on the short need-to-know list, sources say, they are required immediately to inform Robert McFarlane, the President's national security adviser.

Well-placed sources say the move is designed to preserve the confidentiality of presidential decisions being addressed in preparation for the Geneva meetings on Jan. 7 and 8 between Shultz and Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. Those talks are aimed at setting up an agenda for negotiations

on strategic offensive and defensive weapons.

One source said Shultz, McFarlane and others are worried that if President Ronald Reagan decides, for example, to shift the US negotiating position on strategic missile reductions or to offer to negotiate a high-altitude ban on antisatellite weapons, "it would probably leak the next day."

The Administration is determined to keep whatever new cards it develops close to the vest until Shultz and Gromyko face off across the bargaining table, the official said.

Another source explained that if the Soviets learn from press reports of specific new decisions by the United States, it might be inclined not to offer any bold new concessions of its own.

An additional concern is that congressional proponents of one approach or another, if they get advance word of policy shifts, might attempt to put pressure on the White House prior to the Geneva talks to change decisions they disagree with.

One source said the idea for limiting access to the policy debate and muzzling those who participate came from one of Shultz' aides after the secretary complained in a staff meeting about what he called a lack of discipline in protecting sensitive material. He complained bitterly about the

leak on the possibility of MIGs being on a Soviet freighter headed for Nicaragua only a day after the intelligence community had circulated its concern on that score.

Shultz told his subordinates, the source said, that genuine secrets used to be protected better when he was in government in earlier assignments. He expressed the worry that the Russians would know the cards in his hand before he showed up at the table in Geneva.

It was at that point that one of his aides suggested a written nondisclosure pledge, which is now being circulated.

At the White House, spokesman Larry Speakes said the Senior Arms Control Group, made up of subcabinet officials from the State Department, Pentagon, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and the Central Intelligence Agency, were meeting two to three times a week to refine arms control options and make suggestions for presidential decision.

Other sources said Reagan met yesterday with Shultz on the subject and will meet tomorrow with the National Security Council largely on arms control, shortly after conferring with West German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. Kohl is expected to press the President to offer some meaningful policy shifts at Geneva in order to improve the prospects for successful follow-up negotiations, the sources said.